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HD **Cheers to community spirit**
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A windfarm and an ecovillage are shining examples of what can be achieved with time, patience and shared goals, says Linda Daly

From small acorns big oaks grow, even if it does take years for them to reach their full potential. One community in Co Tipperary knows all too well how long it takes to achieve something worthwhile.

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In 2003 a group of Templederry residents hit upon the idea of creating a community-owned windfarm in their small rural townland.

The plan seemed relatively straightforward: they would erect two wind turbines to supply energy to households in the area. However, it would take a decade and some hurdles ? planning objections, turbine delivery delays and a two-year moratorium on grid connection, among them ? to get the scheme up and running.

Still, Templederry became Ireland's first community-run windfarm and an exemplar of what can be done when communities come together, says Clare Watson, a researcher at University College Cork and a contributor to a Ireland and the Climate Crisis, a new book edited by academics at Dublin City University with input from a range of climate experts.

The antidote to climate anxiety is climate action, Watson says, but she writes in the book that when it comes to climate change and Ireland's transition to cleaner energy, there is a "fundamental problem".

"Most people in Ireland are struggling to curb their own greenhouse emissions, and many are resisting renewable energy developments in their area," she says. "Yet to meet the climate challenge, people will need to actively participate in, and support, the substantial lifestyle, infrastructural, and institutional changes that have to be made."

Community energy projects face particular difficulties. Few make it over the line, and groups need patience, determination and finance. "Many energy projects are located in special areas of conservation so planning can be difficult. There is much consultation within communities about where those turbines will be located, and then the projects often meet with objections."

While Watson doesn't like the word "champion", she does believe that community leadership is important. "Research shows that only a certain number of people want to be early adopters whereas if you work in groups or work collectively, with some peer support, you're changing the norm with each other. You can do practical things to get involved. For example, if you have had your home retrofitted, you can invite your neighbours in to see what was involved and how it has benefited you."

Watson, who is involved in the Dingle Peninsula 2030 project, a programme to transition the Dingle Peninsula in Co Kerry to a low-carbon society by the year 2030, says much community action is being driven by the younger generation. "In the past people have seen climate change as something that would happen in the future, which they didn't have to worry about, but now the kids are saying 'this is our future and we want you to do something about it now'."

Social media is also an important tool. In her chapter in Ireland and the Climate Crisis, Lorna Gold, a lecturer at Maynooth University, says the combination of climate strikes, media coverage and a growing interest in climate activism has "galvanised a rapidly evolving climate movement in rural and urban communities alike".

Watson says for community climate projects to work, their memberships must consist of a range of people of different ages and from different backgrounds. "Many groups are male-dominated so women need to be included," she says. "Also, many people feel that climate and energy projects are areas that take up a lot of time so volunteers tend to be older, retired people. It's important to get younger people involved in your community project. It's about engaging the different groups of a given community."

That inclusive attitude should extend to those who may feel alienated by the climate change movement. Farmers can feel threatened, so Watson says it is important to bring them to the table and work with them about how they cut down on their emissions.

"Polarisation can happen quickly," she says. "I've been involved in the environmental movement for years and we have been terrible at telling people what to do. We were judgmental, blamey and finger-wagging. You need to sit and listen and hear where people are at and take on their concerns. The citizens' assembly is an excellent example of how to hear all voices."

Cloughjordan ecovillage in Co Tipperary is another example of a community project that has had some success. The first residents of the village moved into their environmentally friendly homes they built on the 12-acre site in 2009. Today, it has Ireland's only district heating system fuelled entirely by renewables, its own farm, which produces 85 types of fruit and vegetables, as well as 55 sustainably built houses. There are 100 adults and 35 children living in the village.

Peadar Kirby, a professor at the University of Limerick and another contributor to the book, moved into Cloughjordan with his wife in 2009 and is its education co-ordinator.

"Yes, we have built our homes to high ecological standards, yes, we have Ireland's only district heating system, but what you can't see is what lies behind the success of this project ? how we built a sustainable community," he says. "If Ireland is to become carbon-neutral, we have to do it as a community." Kirby says the past 11 years have been the "steepest learning curve" in his life. "I've been living here since January 2009, having moved from Dublin, and in that time I've learnt so much about the challenges of community and also the wonders and supporting nature of community."

The ecovillage wasn't without its challenges. "The economic recession hit us badly. All of our houses were built during that severe downturn ? we built 55 houses between 2009 and 2013 and following 2013 we didn't sell any sites.

"For some people the stresses and strain got difficult and a few people left, some people gave up hope, and a small number became somewhat marginalised from the project. But we have turned the corner and are now on a real trajectory of selling sites." There are 47 plots left to buy on the site. Kirby says for projects to work, members of the community must have shared goals of living sustainably and doing their bit.

"You need to have a community of people who are really committed to doing it, but also those who are willing to implement a plan of action. In Cloughjordan we meet on the third Saturday of every month."

We shouldn't be reliant on government policy to dictate our climate action, he adds, using the example of the laws around building new homes and how the next houses to be built in Cloughjordan will exceed the building requirements.

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Watson argues that good environmentally friendly government policies are needed to guide communities.

The government needs to show leadership, which it hasn't always done, according to David Robbins, an assistant professor at Dublin City University and one of the editors of Ireland and the Climate Crisis.

"What comes through the book quite a lot is just how meek institutional responses have been across the board, from the civil service to the policy makers," he says. "We have to remove red tape for people who are trying to do good stuff to reduce emissions. We have to allow grassroot movements to engage with climate."

Only a certain number of people want to be early adopters

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